UNITED
NATIONS

CRC

Convention on the
Rights of the Child

Distr.
GENERAL

CRC/C/SR.797
10 June 2002

Original: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Thirtieth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 797th MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Monday, 3 June 2002, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. DOEK

CONTENTS

STATEMENT BY THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (continued)

Initial report of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

STATEMENT BY THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

1. The CHAIRPERSON welcomed Ms. Mary Robinson, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and invited her to address the Committee.

2. Ms. ROBINSON (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) thanked the Committee for the opportunity to highlight a number of developments since the previous session. She expressed concern that the Declaration and Plan of Action of the General Assembly special session on children had not fully met expectations and that specific links between the Plan of Action and the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other related international instruments had been weak. It was therefore crucial that the child rights community should continue to stress the commitments of States parties to the Convention within the framework of the implementation process at national level. A more positive aspect of the special session had been the participation of children and young people and their emphasis on the Convention and on human rights in general. She encouraged all those who worked for child rights to continue to strengthen the Committee's efforts to involve children and young people directly in its work.

3. The first session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues had been another historic moment for the international community. As the Secretary-General had noted, the Forum had formidable responsibilities and needed to determine how best to mobilize the expertise and resources of the United Nations system. The Convention on the Rights of the Child was the only legally-binding human rights instrument that explicitly recognized the rights of indigenous children (art. 30) and she therefore encouraged the Committee to consider how it could best support the work of the Forum.

4. During its previous session the Commission on Human Rights had adopted a resolution suggesting that the Secretary-General should appoint an independent expert for the study of violence against children and it was hoped that the expert could be appointed before the end of the summer. The role of the Committee would be crucial in providing expert guidance for the study. The Commission had also approved the appointment of a new Special Rapporteur on the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and it would be important for him or her to look into the child-related implications of that mandate. She encouraged the Committee to consider how its work in the area of HIV/AIDS and adolescent health could assist the Special Rapporteur and how the Special Rapporteur might be involved in the drafting of general comments.

5. She expressed gratitude to the Committee for its input in the lead-up to the World Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance and said she counted on its continued support.

6. As part of the Secretary-General's initiative to strengthen the United Nations, OHCHR had been called upon to contribute ideas and had stressed the need to ensure the effective functioning of the treaty-monitoring bodies. The treaties were the foundation of national action

for the promotion and protection of human rights. The First Inter-Committee meeting to be held in Geneva at the end of June would provide a unique opportunity for all treaty bodies to exchange experiences and streamline their global work, capacity and impact.

7. Both in developed and developing countries, privatization of education, health and other services was a growing trend that needed to be better understood. In order to improve knowledge of the impact on human rights of privatizing such services it was therefore vital to involve the private sector in the Committee's planned discussions on the issue.

8. The CHAIRPERSON thanked the High Commissioner for her support and contribution to the work of the Committee. The Committee was also grateful for the support it received from its well-staffed and dedicated secretariat. He hoped that the increase of the Committee's composition to 18 members would not create difficulties and that the Committee would be able to call on the High Commissioner's expertise and wisdom for ideas on how to implement a two-chamber system.

9. The Committee was currently planning to draft general comments on the role of national human rights institutions with regard to child rights and on adolescent health, with OHCHR support. He pointed out that without OHCHR's contribution it would have been impossible to stage the successful days of discussion on children and the media, State violence against children and violence within the family and schools. He looked forward to the rapid appointment of the independent expert on the study of violence against children.

10. He had already met the Chairperson of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to discuss its cooperation with the Committee and he also hoped that the Committee would be asked to contribute to the First Inter-Committee meeting at the end of June.

11. Ms. SARDENBERG said that the first 10 years of the Committee's existence had made it possible to identify trends and challenges; she looked forward to tackling some of the latest challenges, such as cooperation with the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Although the final documents of the special session on children had been disappointing, the session had provided the Committee with an opportunity to review its work with UNICEF and to seek new forms of cooperation. She looked forward to strengthening cooperation on adolescent health and was certain that the appointment of a special representative on health would be mutually beneficial.

12. She was interested to know what action the Committee could take to be more involved in the follow-up to Durban. She asked to know the High Commissioner's views on how ratification of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention might be accelerated and expressed appreciation for the High Commissioner's outstanding support.

13. Ms. KHATTAB expressed concern regarding the absence of links between the Convention and the final outcome of the special session on children and said that other devices and mechanisms were required for cooperation. She wished to know whether the High Commissioner had suggestions for strengthening the link between United Nations documents and their practical application.

14. Mr. CITARELLA expressed concern that the Committee's heavy workload prevented it from following-up the implementation of the Convention. The final documents of all General Assembly special sessions should concentrate on the Conventions and their interpretation so as to ensure that the final decisions carried more weight. He thanked the High Commissioner for her contribution to the field of human rights and said he hoped her successor would continue to build on her legacy.

15. Ms. KARP expressed gratitude for the High Commissioner's clear and unequivocal voice in the field of human rights, especially with regard to corporal punishment of children.

16. Ms. ROBINSON (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that one way for the Committee to become more involved in the follow-up to the Durban Conference would be to ensure that the Durban Declaration was taken into consideration when it examined States parties' reports. The coming into force of the two Optional Protocols was very important and it was vital to increase the number of ratifications. That goal required a proactive approach, which would be supported by the increase of the Committee's membership to 18.

17. With regard to strengthening the link between the Convention on the Rights of the Child and discussions at the General Assembly special session on children, the Committee had a significant role to play because countries had committed to obligations under the Convention and reported to the Committee, which could make recommendations. It was also important to take the special assembly Declaration into consideration and fit it into a rights-based approach. The Committee should continue to build new procedures with Special Rapporteurs and undertake innovative work. It was also important to emphasize that in the new climate following the events of 11 September 2001, terrorism could not be countered merely through the introduction of new legislation to address symptoms. It was necessary to aim at prevention by implementing the existing normative structure, which required increased financial and intellectual resources in support of the treaty bodies.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4)

> Initial report of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (CRC/C/28/Add.18); CRC/C/Q/SVG/1; HRI/CORE/1/Add.36; written replies of the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the questions in the list of issues (document without a symbol distributed in the meeting room in English only))

18. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines took places at the Committee table.

19. Ms. MIGUEL (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines), replying to a question about discrimination against disabled children, said that there were three schools for the disabled in the country. It was hoped that ramps would soon be introduced in public places and there was also ongoing training available for those working with the disabled. Disabled children in homes were the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Development, which provided them with wheelchairs, nappies, health care and other services.

20. Ms. AL-THANI asked whether it was planned to integrate disabled children into regular schools and other institutions. She also inquired as to whether the statistics in the tables, according to which there was only 1 visually impaired child and 18 children with impaired hearing in the country, were correct.

21. Ms. KARP said the statistics provided by the State party did not cover disabled children at home, who were not integrated either into regular schools or special schools. She wondered whether it might be possible to conduct a survey as a basis for a policy covering all disabled children.

22. It seemed that children with learning disabilities had also been placed in the special schools, a measure that might block their harmonious development. The Government might consider integrating them into regular schools.

23. Ms. MIGUEL (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said it was indeed the case that there were only very few blind or deaf children in schools.

24. She agreed it was important to carry out a survey of disabled children. Some of them had already been abandoned by their parents and they needed to be shown they were loved and would not be abandoned again. The Government was new and still needed to draw up its plans to deal with disabled children in a better way.

25. Ms. SNAGG (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said the Government hoped to draft a children's code incorporating the provisions of the Convention as part of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) regional programme.

26. One example of discrimination against children born out of wedlock was the fact that the High Court, which was one of only two courts to which maintenance claims could be addressed, would entertain claims from "married families" only.

27. Ms. CATO (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines), replying to a question by Ms. Karp, confirmed that different maintenance levels applied to mothers of children born out of wedlock. The Government hoped to change that situation, since it amounted to discrimination against the children. In addition, mothers could claim maintenance only until the child turned five, unless they took the father to court during that period. That was a difficult decision and one that placed them in an embarrassing situation since, even though maintenance cases were heard in camera, in such a small society it was not long before their situation became common knowledge.

28. Ms. SNAGG (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that a survey carried out in June 2001 had revealed 20 children living on the streets of Kingstown. The root causes had been abandonment, abuse or neglect, although in a few cases the parents had encouraged the children to go out begging. Since then the Government had developed a comprehensive programme of counselling and training to enable the children to return to their families.

29. Ms. MIGUEL (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that prenatal and post-natal care was provided to mothers; children could obtain milk, sugar and cereals at clinics; and vaccinations were administered regularly.

30. The new Government had made strenuous efforts to educate health professionals and the population at large concerning HIV/AIDS. In reply to a question by Ms. Al-Thani, she said the National Strategic Plan 2001-2006 addressed the issue of educating the public in order to avoid stigmatization of those living with HIV/AIDS.

31. Ms. SNAGG (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said the child's best interests were the paramount consideration in matters concerning children. The issue would be addressed specifically in the course of the legislative reform, but the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution were not exclusive of children. In reply to a question by Ms. Karp, she confirmed that, although children were constitutionally entitled to seek redress in the High Court for a violation of those rights, they could do so only through their guardian. Much as the Government wished to implement the Convention fully, it was necessary to proceed carefully if it was to carry the population with it in the changes that needed to be made. It was a religious country and people believed there were certain things that simply had to be done through children's guardians.

32. Children had access to the Internet in the majority of schools from primary level upwards, and in their homes. Access could be monitored at school, but it was difficult to protect children in their homes, particularly if they were left alone with the computer as a form of child minder. Resource centres, including libraries, were available in all new schools and in communities.

33. Ms. CATO (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said both domestic and intercountry adoption existed. Arrangements were particularly common with Canada. She had heard allegations of children being sold, but she had no evidence of that practice. Replying to a question by Ms. Sardenberg, she said the Adoption Board dealt with both types of adoption; the Government was considering ratifying the 1993 Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption.

34. There were large numbers of abandoned children and many adoption applications were received. However, unlike neighbouring Saint Lucia, where the State had the right to arrange for abandoned children to be adopted after two years, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines had no such system and parents refused to give permission for adoption. As a result, large numbers of those children might remain in foster homes from infancy to their teens.

35. In reply to a question by Ms. Tigerstedt-Tähtelä, she said there had been no domestic adoptions in 1999, 10 in 2000 and 4 in 2001; and 14 intercountry adoptions in 1999, 25 in 2000 and 15 in 2001.

36. The Government was working to clarify the legal position of unmarried putative fathers. It was not clear even to the Adoption Board whether they had a right of consent to adoption.

37. Ms. MIGUEL (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said education was one of her Government's top priorities. Younger children could attend play-based day-care centres and pre-schools and entered the formal school system at the age of five. In reply to a question by Mr. Citarella, she said education was free and compulsory between the ages of 5 and 12 and it

was the Government's intention to raise the age of completion, in order to avoid discrimination in education. In addition, strenuous efforts were being made to ensure that teachers were trained before they entered the classroom, which had previously not always been the case.

38. Ms. SNAGG (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines), referring to the question of international cooperation, said the Caribbean as a whole tended not to attract international funding because its overall economic status made it appear that funding was unnecessary, which was not the case. For that reason there was no finance available for non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

39. With regard to reporting under the Convention, there had been problems of communication between the Government and its missions to the United Nations. There were also problems with the provision of data by the departments responsible for statistical information. Both those problems were being addressed.

40. Ms. MIGUEL (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that coordination and collation of data in her own department was being improved in order to avoid a repetition of the embarrassing delay in submitting the Government's report.

41. Ms. SNAGG (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said children were being encouraged to participate in schools through the establishment of school councils and a national school council. The idea had not met with much success in primary schools, however.

42. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ asked what the situation was in families: were children encouraged to speak up and defend their views?

43. Ms. SNAGG (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said traditionally parents were seen as those who should speak. The initiatives in schools should bring about a change in that perception, although it would take time.

44. Ms. KARP wondered whether judges and social service workers were trained to listen to and communicate with children in order to take their views into account without adopting a paternalistic or over-protective approach. There was currently no obligation for courts to hear children's views in adoption cases, for example, and she would like to know whether there were plans to give children the right to be heard in all situations affecting them.

45. Ms. CATO (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said members of the juridical service had attended a course on that subject two years before, but no training had been provided since then.

46. Ms. MIGUEL (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said it would take time to make progress on the issue of corporal punishment. Religious parents who followed the maxim "Spare the rod, spoil the child" must be helped to see that children learned what they lived, and that many of the children on the streets were there as a result of severe abuse. Women, too, were frequently beaten and came to Family Services to seek shelter; some even committed suicide.

47. Ms. CATO (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that belief in flogging children as a means of instilling discipline was a part of her society's culture. The notion of "children's rights" was widely misunderstood and it was difficult to persuade people that it did not mean doing away with all forms of discipline.

48. The CHAIRPERSON said he understood that a perpetrator could sometimes avoid prosecution by paying the victim's family a sum of money and that victims themselves were sometimes held in police stations. He would be grateful for clarification of how victims of child abuse were dealt with.

49. Ms. CATO (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said counselling was provided to victims, who were deeply traumatized, and the perpetrators were brought to justice. The law did not provide, however, for cases in which the mother of a child whose life had basically been destroyed accepted money from the perpetrator in order not to bring charges. One aspect of the problem was the high numbers of mothers who migrated to work abroad, leaving their children with relatives, who might well abuse them.

50. Ms. MIGUEL (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said many girls aged under 13 were victims of abuse. Attempts were being made to enable them to return to school so that they could continue their education.

51. Ms. KARP said that sexual abuse cases called for separate specialized treatment; she wondered whether personnel trained for that purpose were available.

52. Ms. CATO (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that trained personnel and counsellors were available, and that situations were monitored. But the country currently lacked a child psychiatrist, because resources were not available, and it was hoped that some funding agency could help.

53. Ms. CHUTIKUL asked whether there was a programme of preventive measures, under which children were taught to protect themselves, and whether there was a multidisciplinary approach to assisting child victims of abuse.

54. Ms. CATO (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that problems stemmed largely from failure to report cases and from the disappearance of perpetrators. But every possible assistance was given to victims, especially to girls in school, where nurses came to give counselling. Efforts were made to promote preventive measures. Many abused girls and teenage mothers were cared for in a special home run by the Catholic community, with a government subsidy; the same home accommodated children suffering from AIDS, care being taken to segregate the two groups. Replying to a question by Ms. Sardenberg, she said that sex education programmes were conducted.

55. Ms. KARP said that, while appreciating the difficult economic situation that the country shared with many other developing nations, she thought that the entire education system should be reappraised. Especially disquieting was the record of examinations at the end of the primary phase, which revealed a very high failure rate and a resultant large number of children leaving

the school system. She was concerned, in that regard, that no higher education curriculum was mentioned under the aims of education. On health matters, she would appreciate further information about the mortality rate for children under five, which seemed to have doubled between 1993 and 1997 after a fall in earlier years, and on the mental health of children. She also asked whether special centres were being considered for child narcotics victims, since it seemed that they and other problem children were placed indiscriminately in mental health centres.

56. Since sexual activity in the country began early in life, she wondered whether there was a programme of sex education and contraceptive distribution. It would also be useful to know what measures were taken pursuant to the outcome of the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. With regard to juvenile justice, the minimum age of criminal responsibility needed to be raised and the scope of protection widened to cover young persons up to 18 years old. More information was needed on plans to establish approved schools and alternative punishment measures to prison sentences. She was concerned that, since there were no approved schools, 16 year olds could be sent to prison, and wondered whether offenders under that age could be sent to prison also. It seemed that, in some cases, young offenders charged jointly with adults could be tried in magistrates' courts instead of family courts; she asked what procedures were applied to young offenders in such hearings.

57. Mr. AL-SHEDDI said that, according to the report, some 45 per cent of families in the country seemed to have a mother but no father; he would like to have details of any studies carried out into the impact of that situation on the life of children. It seemed that there was very little pre-school education for children aged between 3 and 5, and that the few institutions available were private and unregulated. Another matter of concern to the Committee was the poor quality of examinations. He asked whether access to primary schools was a problem in any areas, and what facilities were available in the country for higher or university education.

58. Ms. AL-THANI said that the statistics, in the report and the written replies, relating to infant mortality reflected such an erratic pattern over the years that she believed they must be inaccurate. She was also puzzled by the terms "Normal, Moderate, Severe, Obese" in the list of written replies. With reference to the reported 1997 survey on malnutrition, it was hard to believe that, out of over 8,000 children tested, none had been deemed undernourished. She would like to know exactly what steps the authorities were taking to tackle the problems of infant mortality and obesity. The figures on breastfeeding were good, but related to infants up to the age of 3 months, whereas the period currently recommended was 6 months. She asked what was being done to deal with the problems of substance abuse, including smoking, among young persons.

59. Ms. CHUTIKUL asked whether any studies had been conducted on mental health, particularly of adolescents. It seemed that there was little pre-school care and that the few services available were privately run; she wondered whether there was any accreditation system for the carers. Information about indigenous groups, with particular reference to access to social services, would also be welcome.

60. Ms. KHATTAB suggested that the information just requested should include details about the white minority, such as their numbers and socio-economic situation. She was concerned about special protection measures for children, since domestic violence seemed very prevalent. With regard to children and narcotics, she wondered whether relevant studies distinguished between traffickers and users. The Government had recently destroyed marijuana crops, but she wondered what precautions existed against their reintroduction. She would appreciate further information about the reported numbers of street children, particularly since the number of 20 children reported in the capital city seemed small. The high rates of teenage pregnancy and the child labour situation were disquieting; she asked what measures were taken to implement the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182). She also wondered whether any measures had been taken to establish rehabilitation centres and whether training courses were in place for law-enforcement personnel. Lastly, she would like to know what regional cooperation existed for tasks such as database building.

61. Mr. CITARELLA asked for further information about the prevalence of violence against women and the incidence of discrimination against minorities. He would also appreciate details on cases of children brought before family and juvenile courts, since the written replies contained no statistics relating to juvenile justice. All the Committee members were concerned that the age of criminal responsibility in the country was too low, and that the lack of juvenile courts meant that some children were tried in normal courts. They also felt that the Government should take steps to provide proper juvenile detention centres so that young persons were not kept in police stations pending trial. Other matters that warranted review were the practice of caning and the lack of automatic legal assistance for young persons brought before the courts.

62. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ, noting the overwhelming proportion of women teachers in early childhood education, asked whether any measures were in hand to attract male teachers. She also asked what was being done to promote vocational training, what sectors were targeted, whether diversification was encouraged and to what extent the private sector was involved. Lastly, she would like to know whether poverty was on the increase or decrease.

63. Ms. SARDENBERG asked whether instances of bullying and aggression among children were recorded, and whether school programmes were aimed at countering such behaviour and promoting a culture of peace and tolerance. She would welcome the delegation's comments on the apparent lack of a comprehensive scheme for maternity leave, and also asked whether any preventive measures were being taken with regard to tourism-related sexual exploitation and child prostitution. Noting that there was no United Nations agency resident in the country, she wondered whether, in addition to regional cooperation, any direct assistance - in capacity-building, for example - was received from UNESCO, WHO or other bodies.

64. Ms. KARP asked whether the country's clinics and other health institutions were part of a unified structure. With regard to sexual abuse, it was disquieting that victims often had to be kept at police stations pending court proceedings; she would appreciate more details about the situation. Lastly, with regard to the Youth Manifesto programme mentioned in the delegation's opening statement, she wondered what was meant by "de-institutionalization", since no institutional structure seemed to exist.

The meeting was suspended at 5.05 p.m. and resumed at 5.20 p.m.

65. Ms. MIGUEL (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that children entered the primary school system at the age of five. In order to gain a place at secondary school, pupils had to pass the Common Entrance Examination, which they sat at the age of 10. Those who failed the exam pursued a primary-level course and were given the opportunity to sit the School Leaving Examination, giving them a chance to enter secondary school. Success rates were very low and it was common for children to drop out of the school system if they did not pass the exams; many ended up going to the hills to work in the marijuana fields. The Government supported groups such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, which organized activities after school and during the holidays to help children to realize their full potential.

66. Ms. KARP expressed concern about the extraordinarily high failure rate of students; for example, of the 2,558 students who had sat the Common Entrance Examination in 2000, only 789 had passed. In the same year, 792 students had sat the School Leaving Examination, but only 32 had passed. It would be interesting to learn whether the pass mark had been set high deliberately, because of a shortage of places in secondary schools.

67. Ms. MIGUEL (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that the high illiteracy rate was a matter of grave concern to the Government. In the past, many primary schoolteachers had had only a secondary school education. Now, the Ministry of Education had taken steps to ensure that all prospective teachers attended a teacher training college. Subjects such as home economics and woodwork were taught in primary schools to encourage illiterate pupils to stay in school. The Ministry of Education had introduced an adult literacy programme, which had proved to be very popular.

68. Ms. CATO (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that bullying was not a major problem in schools. There was a move in favour of abolishing the Common Entrance Examination and making secondary education compulsory for all children. It was recognized that many good students did not perform well on the day of the exam because of the pressure placed on them by their parents. Some private secondary schools accepted students who had failed the exam; such students often achieved good results at school.

69. Students could prepare for university education at the Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Community College. However, as there were no universities in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, students usually had to study abroad. In some cases, students were able to complete the first and second years of their studies through the distance education facility offered by the University of the West Indies.

70. Ms. SNAGG (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that Internet access was good in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. A part-time distance learning programme was available on the Internet, enabling students to obtain a bachelor's or a master's degree without leaving home. In reply to a question about early childhood education, she said that steps had been taken to provide better supervision and better standards of teaching at pre-school level. All staff had to be trained by VINSAVE (St. Vincent and the Grenadines Save the Children Fund).

71. Ms. MIGUEL (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines), replying to a question about the rising infant mortality rate, said that an increasing number of children were dying as a result of HIV/AIDS.

72. Ms. AL-THANI, supported by Ms. KARP, said that it was unlikely that HIV/AIDS was responsible for the increasing infant mortality rate, even if mother-to-child transmission rates were high. She failed to understand why the statistics on infant mortality provided in the written replies were so different to those provided in the State party's initial report. She pointed out that the infant mortality rate was usually measured per thousand live births.

73. Ms. MIGUEL (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that she had visited hospitals and witnessed babies dying of HIV/AIDS. It was regrettable that the situation was deteriorating. She would endeavour to obtain further information from the Ministry of Health.

74. Ms. SNAGG (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines), pointing out that the population of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was very small, said that one or two cases could make a big difference to the statistics.

75. Ms. CATO (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines), replying to a question about teenage pregnancies, said that the Government encouraged young people to abstain from early sexual behaviour and ensured that sex education was provided in schools; nevertheless, teenagers continued to be sexually active. A recent proposal to distribute free condoms in schools had met with strong opposition from parents. Contraception was available from clinics free of charge; however, many teenagers gave false names when asking for contraception because society traditionally frowned on such behaviour and word often got back to their parents. The Government's long-term objective was to make it mandatory for teenagers to attend school, which was likely to help reduce the number of sexually-active teenagers.

76. Children with disabilities were allowed to attend mainstream schools but were often unable to attend classes because of lack of transportation. Parents were often too poor to buy a vehicle and public buses were not adapted to the needs of passengers with disabilities. Unfortunately, some parents were ashamed to send their disabled child to school.

77. The Government's next legislative reform would include a system of community sentencing for juveniles. Some judges had already started to hand down community sentences for juvenile offenders. Minors under the age of 16 who were charged with an adult could be taken to the Magistrate's Court, but all other minors under the age of 16 were brought before the Family Court. Juvenile offenders could be held in a police station if they committed a serious crime; however, in practice, there were very few cases.

78. The Liberty Lodge Boys Training Centre had originally been established as a vocational training centre but had evolved into a facility for the care of abandoned or neglected children and young offenders. Children were referred to the Centre for a short period but were often left there for as long as 10 years. A new rule had been introduced, stipulating that children had to go home for the summer vacation and could stay at the Centre for a maximum of five years only. It was hoped that the introduction of community sentencing would mean that child victims were no longer kept in the same establishment as young offenders. Replying to a question by Ms. Karp, she said that it was very rare for abused children to be sent home. Normally they would be placed in foster care.

79. Ms. SNAGG (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that the Government recognized that the minimum age of criminal responsibility was too low; it was another issue that would be addressed in the next legislative review. However, she expressed concern that it would be difficult to enforce new legislation in the field of children's rights without a change in attitudes among the general population. Therefore, it was essential to conduct awareness-raising activities and to establish a system to monitor compliance with the new legislation.

80. Ms. MIGUEL (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that the Carib minority did not face any sort of discrimination or marginalization. The Government was endeavouring to ensure that the Carib community had access to the same facilities as other citizens, despite the fact that their villages were sometimes geographically isolated. For example, a new school with modern facilities was due to be opened in Sandy Bay in September 2002. When the Soufriere volcano had erupted in 1979, many people from the Carib community had been forced to evacuate and continued to live in the towns.

81. Ms. CATO (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that the Government was taking steps to address the problem of substance abuse among children. Marion House was a non-profit NGO established by the Catholic Church in 1989 which provided counselling and therapy services for children. Children were also able to attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. Although there had been some positive results, lack of human resources was hindering the Government's work in that field. Unfortunately, a number of children were hospitalized in mental health departments in relation to drug abuse because there were no other facilities available to care for them; efforts were made to stabilize the children and send them home as soon as possible, although parents were often reluctant to take their children back.

82. Ms. SNAGG (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that there were only 20 children living on the streets in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The Government had developed a programme to address the problem and efforts were being made to reintegrate those children into their families. However, it was a growing phenomenon that needed constant attention.

83. On the issue of regional cooperation, she said that the Government had been working with various international organizations in the fields of health, education and social development, including the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). With the exception of UNESCO, most of the organizations did not have a representative in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

84. Ms. CATO (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that mothers working in the public sector were granted paid maternity leave of one month. It was hoped that the period would be extended to three months. The issue of paternity leave was under consideration. Women working in the private sector were often granted a longer period of maternity leave.

85. Children from single-parent families enjoyed the same rights as children from nuclear families. It was culturally acceptable for unmarried couples to live together and there was no social stigma attached to children born out of wedlock.

86. Ms. MIGUEL (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that the majority of teachers were women. The Government was trying to encourage more men to become teachers but teaching was still widely considered to be a woman's profession.

87. Ms. SNAGG (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that the white minority in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was extremely small and that there was no evidence of any racial problems between the different ethnic groups.

88. Ms. MIGUEL (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that the rising levels of unemployment had forced many people to work in the marijuana fields. The law-enforcement agencies were working to ensure that there was no re-cultivation of the marijuana plantations. The United States of America had funded a programme to eradicate the production of marijuana.

89. Ms. KARP thanked the delegation for its informative replies. It was clear that the new administration had a strong political will to improve the situation of children in the State party and she was confident that it would succeed; however, much remained to be done. She urged the State party to give due consideration to the questions that had been raised in the course of the meeting and to the concerns contained in the Committee's concluding observations. It was essential for the Government to prepare a concrete plan of action and to focus on changing attitudes with regard to child rights. She recognized that such changes took time and that it was important to strike a balance between protecting child rights and respecting the traditional role of parents. She urged the Government to lead the way by making a clear statement on the need to protect the human dignity of the child, in particular with regard to corporal punishment.

90. Ms. MIGUEL (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said she was confident that the people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and children in particular, would successfully meet the challenges and embrace the opportunities arising from globalization and the impact of information technology, as they had in other areas. Her people were not known for their defeatism and had always been able to turn setbacks into advances. The Government would do its utmost to uphold the rights of the child.

91. The CHAIRPERSON thanked the delegation for its frank replies. He was convinced that the State party had the determination needed to improve the situation of children.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.